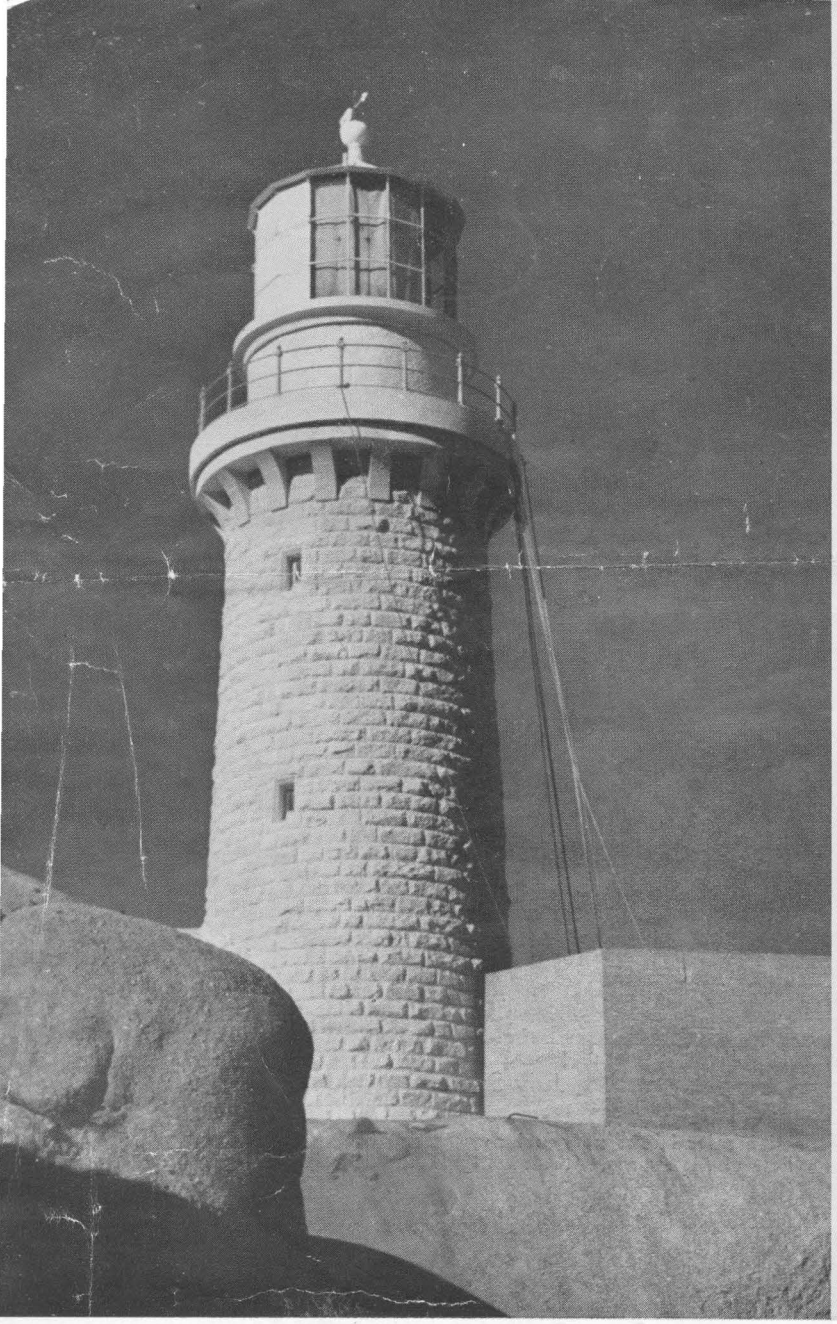


**Stark against the lowering sky, the Wilson's Promontory light is one of the many citadels which are "watchers of the coast."**

—"Age."

# WATCHERS *of the* COAST

By DAVID MATHEW

**A century ago, when Melbourne was still in its infancy, the merchantmen and migrant ships of the time had a far greater task to reach Port Phillip Bay and the sheltered waters of the Port of Melbourne than the routine business it has become to-day.**

**Victoria's rugged coastline presented the sailing vessel with a tough hazard after the rigors of a long voyage from England, as the toll of ships and men's lives bears full testimony, for there was scant navigational aid.**

VICTORIA'S first lighthouse was erected at Cape Otway in 1848, but the authorities were perturbed at the number of wrecks along other parts of the coast, and the development of the colony made the need for safe navigation aids apparent.

Eleven years later lights were established at Wilson's Promontory and at Cape Schanck, and a real step forward was taken in 1861, when the lighthouse at Cape Wickham, on King Island, was completed. King Island, at the western end of Bass Strait, had claimed many unwitting victims.

Those were the pioneering days, and now our continent is virtually ringed by these "watchers of the coast." It is an interesting fact that at the present time the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service controls 275 lights and other aids to navigation.

The most important Victorian lights are established at permanent landmarks—Cape Otway, Cape Schanck, Wilson's Promontory and Gabo Island. Altogether there are 32 navigational aids for the sea lanes of Bass Strait, including three radio beacons.

Fifty years ago the lightkeeper led a lonely life at his isolated post. To-day, however, with wireless receivers and transmitters installed, and visits by the Lighthouse Service steamer more frequent, he does not feel so remote from his fellowmen in the cities.

But this does not completely lessen the hazardous nature of his life for, although wireless communication can be maintained, the lightkeeper and his family are still far removed from medical assistance in the case of emergency.

Take, for example, an incident in November last year, when the young daughter of Lightkeeper W. D. Bogan contracted pneumonia, and had to be taken off Deal Island, in Bass Strait.

The little girl, Leila, became ill in the middle of the week, but it was three days after assistance was called for before she could be removed from the

island. During this time her parents were in constant communication with a doctor on the mainland.

For those three days a violent storm raged through the strait, but eventually a fisherman from Port Albert got through in his boat, and Leila was taken to hospital at Yarram.

Although the work of the lightkeeper is more or less routine, the men do not regard it as monotonous. At only a few stations, Cape Nelson, Cape Schanck, Deal Island and King Island, is a 40-hour week worked. Here the lights are electric with an alarm system and are not attended at night, which means that the lightkeepers are on call at night, but on duty only during the day.

The other attended stations maintain a continuous 24-hour watch. The work entails sending weather reports to the Meteorological Bureau every three hours, signalling to some ships and watching the light. The men work to a roster system and a lightkeeper is on duty about 65 hours a week on an average.

## Spare Time

During their spare time the men tend to vegetable gardens and livestock. Most of the stations keep poultry, but at Deal Island sheep and cattle are run, and sheep are kept at Gabo, thus reducing the dependence on stores brought by the lighthouse steamer "Cape York," or the mail and stores contractor.

The lighthouses themselves are mostly the original towers constructed, in some cases, many years ago.

Gabo, the most easterly light and the turning point from New South Wales to Victoria, has a tower built of red granite, quarried on the island in 1862.

Next light on the run westward towards Port Philip Bay and Melbourne is at Cape Everard, and was installed in 1890. Cape Everard, originally known as Point Hicks, was the first part of Australia that Captain Cook sighted in 1770. A small obelisk, visible from the sea, is erected there to mark the spot and commemorate the event.

Nearer to Wilson's Promontory, the next main light is on Cliffy Island, most south-easterly of the Seal or Direction Group. The island itself is a small rock of two or three acres, and the lighthouse is equipped with a diaphone—commonly known as a fog horn.

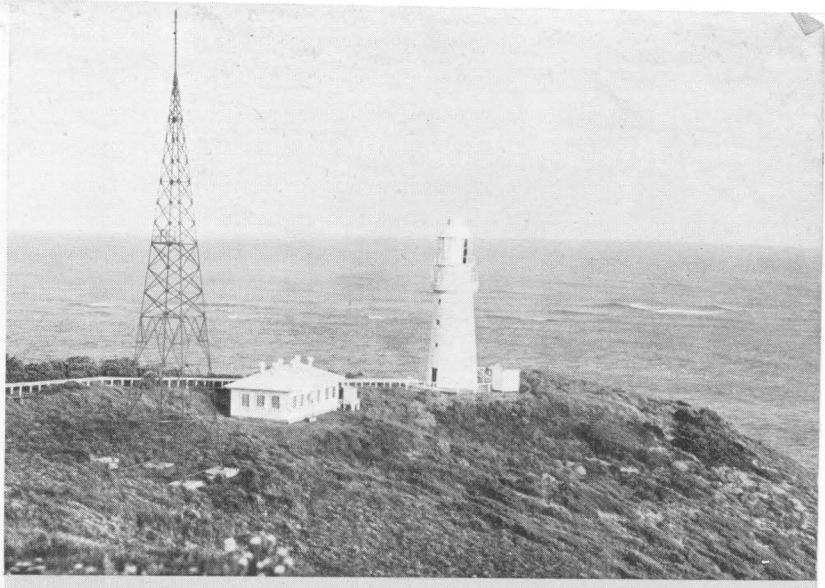
Wilson's Promontory is possibly the most well-known light on the Victorian coast, both to the average public and to mariners. The sea is very deep at the point and ships pass within a quarter of a mile of land.

Of the other Victorian lights, the most interesting are at Cape Schanck and Cape Otway, which, with Cape Wickham (King Island), have marine radio beacons installed. The three form a triangle and enable vessels to ascertain their position irrespective of the weather conditions prevailing.

Cape Wickham light was, of course, first erected because of the extremely large number of wrecks occurring on the island. Later, it was found the one light was not enough as some ships were going ashore further down on the western side; so a tower was built at Currie, in 1880, to afford more protection.

**Wilson's Promontory is possibly the most well-known light on the Victorian coast. Ships pass within quarter of a mile, for the waters are very deep.**

—"Herald."



—Victorian Railways

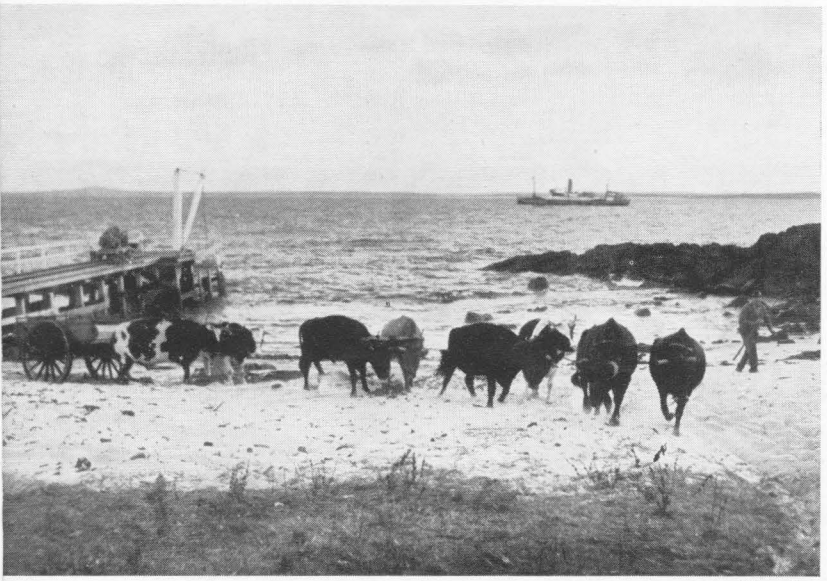
**Cape Otway lighthouse, which recently celebrated its centenary. Materials for original construction were brought by pack-horse over the rugged Otway Ranges.**

—"Herald."

**Before the installation of lighthouses, King Island, at the western end of Bass Strait, claimed many unwitting victims.**

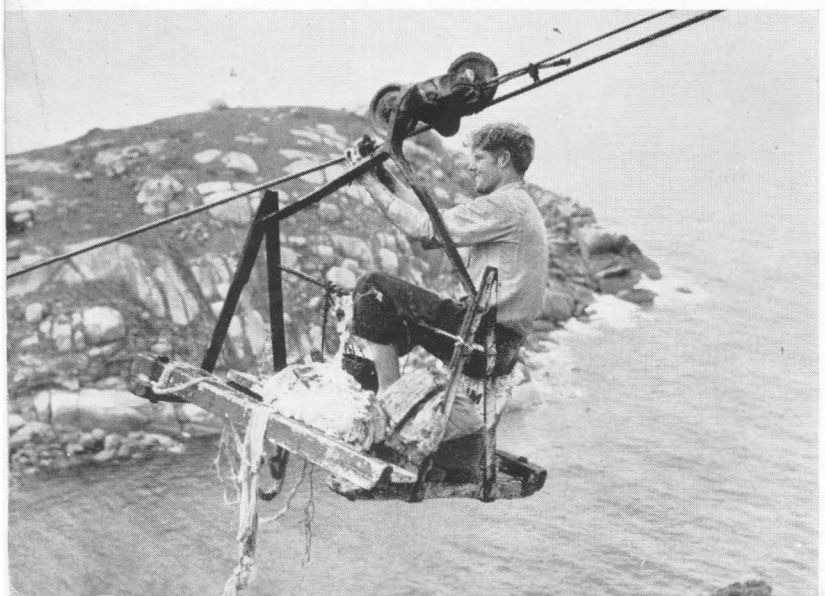
—"Age."

**Mrs. Len Jackson, wife of the head lighthouse keeper on Tasman Island, comes home from annual holidays. Leaving the steamer "Cape York," she was carried 800 yards by flying fox.**



—"Age."

**Supply ship "Cape York" stands off Swan Island, in Bass Strait, on her mission of bringing stores and relief to keepers. A bullock team waits at the water's edge to bring up supplies.**



**Citadel Island's light was established in 1913. Going "aboard" or "ashore" calls for a ride in the flying fox.**
—"Age."

At the other end of Bass Strait lie three islands known as Deal, Swan and Goose. Although these are in Tasmanian waters, Deal Island, particularly, plays a big part in navigation through the Strait. The lighthouses on all of the islands were constructed by convict labour in 1845 and 1846.

Deal Island light is exceptional, being 1000 ft. above sea level, and probably the highest in the southern hemisphere, although the tower itself is only 73 ft. high.

Most recently erected lighthouses are on Citadel Island and at Cape Liptrap, established in 1913, and at Cape Woollami, 1928. In a few months work will begin on another light on King Island—at Stokes Point, in the south, and a new concrete tower is to be built at Cape Liptrap to replace the old steel tower which has become unsafe.

The lighthouses are maintained by a skilled staff of mechanics stationed in Melbourne. It is their job to keep all the plant and equipment working in an efficient manner. They spend about one-third of their time at the lighthouses and the rest in the city workshop. The lightkeepers themselves effect only minor repairs.

The mechanics look after the unattended lights entirely, visiting them every three months, and go to the manned lights at regular intervals for routine maintenance. In addition, they make special trips for repairs and adjustments if anything goes wrong.

Types of lighthouses on the Australian coast vary considerably, each having been designed to meet the particular purpose for which it was required.

## Mechanism

The powerful light beams of up to 3,000,000 candle power are produced by the magnification through revolving lenses of either a powerful electric lamp or an incandescent mantle, in which a mixture of air and kerosene vapour is burnt.

Revolving lenses comprise a number of panels or groups of panels, each of which projects a separate beam in a separate direction, the panels being so arranged that when the lens is rotated a distinctive flashing character is produced. This eliminates the possibility of that light being mistaken for any other light on the same section of the coast.

The lenses used in these important lighthouses are for the main part very large, being about 10 ft. high and 6 ft. diameter, and mounted on pedestals containing the machinery for revolving them, the whole apparatus requiring a lantern or housing some 25 ft. high and 12 ft. diameter to protect it from the weather.

Automatic lights are mostly exhibited from steel or concrete towers and show a flashing light. This is produced by the burning of acetylene gas as it is delivered to a burner at regular intervals by a flashing mechanism. The acetylene gas is stored in cylinders which have to be replenished every 12 months.

During the daytime, except in very dull weather, the gas supply is shut off by the automatic operation of a sun-valve, which normally closes about sunrise

[*Continued on page 36.*

# Watchers of the Coast

*Continued from page 18*

and opens about sunset to exhibit the light only in hours of darkness. The mechanism apparatus is replaced each year by a spare mechanism overhauled during the previous year.

Transport of stores to the majority of Victorian lights is a difficult problem. Of course some, like Cape Nelson, Cape Otway and Cape Schanck, have roads right up to the station.

At Wilson's Promontory, everything landed must be taken in by ship's boat and discharged by crane at the landing. A flying-fox then takes the stores another 330 ft. higher to the site of the lighthouse.

The same principle is employed at Cliffy Island, but instead of a flying-fox a tramline is used.

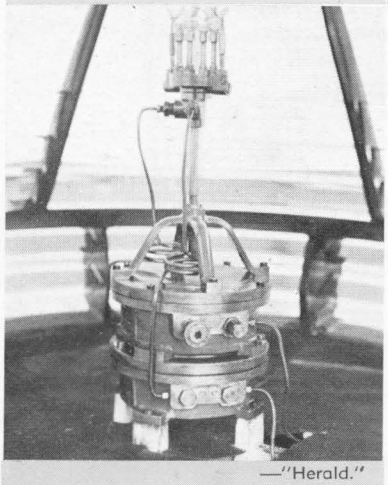
The Gabo landing is on the opposite side of the island to the light and about a mile away. Supplies are transported across by a jeep, which has superseded the old horse and cart.

The weekly trip by the Cape Everard lightkeepers for mail and stores is highly interesting, but can be hazardous. One of the three keepers leaves the station at six o'clock in the morning, and for the first five miles of his journey proceeds along the beach with horse and sleigh. Then he leaves his horse in a paddock and takes a jeep about 20 miles into Cann River. The first 10 miles is along a rough, bush track which passes through several swamps and over a mountain range. After picking up the mail and stores, the trip is repeated in reverse and takes in all about 10 or 11 hours. However, soon a good road may be provided all the way from Cann River.

Lighthouses seem certain to hold their place on the Australian coast for a great many years, but radar is supplementing their service. The light, the radio beacon system and radar will ensure great speed and safety for shipping on its way to and from the Port of Melbourne.

—"Age."

**The supply steamer, "Cape York," makes four trips a year to eastern Victorian and Tasmanian lights.**



—"Herald."

**So small, and yet so vital to safety—the flashing mechanism of the Citadel Island light.**

**Cape Everard light, installed 1890. Cape Everard was the first part of Australia sighted by Captain Cook. It was originally named Point Hicks, after the young ship's officer who drew Cook's attention to the land.**

—"Age."

—"Age."

**Modern radio transmitters and receivers, such as this one at Wilson's Promontory, have done much to relieve monotony.**

—"Herald."

**Cliffy Island Light. Cliffy Island is in the Seal (or Direction) Group.**

**An unusual view of the spiral stairway in the Currie Light, King Island.** —"Herald."